

## Worship is Prayerful

Passages: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22

John 14:15–27

To start off today's sermon, I want to try a very simple exercise with you—it's called a "word association game"—I'll say a word, and, as quick as you can, I want you to tell me the first word that pops into your head. Ready? "Dog"! "Snow"! Here's a third word-- 'Worship'. What's the first word that pops into your head?

In the majority of cases, the first word that Christians think of is music. Indeed, in most contemporary churches, the words 'worship' and 'singing' are virtually synonymous—We hear the pastor begin the service by enthusiastically saying something like, "Let's all stand as we worship the Lord today!" Then, the music team goes up on stage and leads us in worship. Then, after the worship time is finished, we move on to other things: the announcements, Bible reading, sermon, prayer time, etc. (It's funny, but nobody thinks of these things as 'worship'!)

Now, I hope that you already **feel a bit uneasy** with this picture. I hope you **feel uncomfortable** with the way we have reduced worship to singing! But, my goal today is not just to make you feel uncomfortable—my goal is to take you into the Scriptures and remind you of what the true definition of 'worship' really is!

**Let's pray.**

It's not wrong to connect worship with music and singing. After all, the Scriptures do this quite often, particularly in the Psalms. Psalm 95:2 says, "**Let us enter His presence with thanksgiving and shout triumphantly to Him in song.**" Psalm 96 says, "**Sing a new song to the Lord...Sing to the Lord, praise His name.**" Psalm 98 also repeats this same command: "**Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has performed wonders...**"

It is clear that worship can involve music and singing! **But** singing is only a small part of what the Bible says about worship.

Have you been watching the Olympics? Just because you may spend all your time watching the **swimming**, does that mean that **all the other events** don't exist? Of course not! Swimming is only one small part of the total package of the Olympics! The same is true of worship. You may like to sing, and that's fine! But once you start to think that singing is all there is to worship, you've lost touch with the Biblical reality of worship!

Indeed, what I want to emphasize today is the fact that **worship is essentially a matter of the heart**. It flows from an inner attitude which is primarily an **attitude of prayer**! That's why my title for this sermon is "**Worship is Prayerful**". Worship comes from a prayerful heart—it comes from a humble and reflective heart, a heart attuned to God!

**Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22.**

When Paul wrote this First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Christians of that city had been experiencing a great deal of persecution and suffering! And so, Paul encourages them to persevere by turning their eyes to the glorious Day of Christ's return. Most importantly, he commands them to have an **attitude of worship** as an antidote to their anxieties and fears. Indeed, these 7 punchy verses contain 7 simple commands about that attitude of worship.

But notice one thing: All 7 commands are in the present continuous tense. What does that mean? It means that Paul wants his 7 statements about worship to be far more than a once-a-week experience! He wants them to become a way of life—a lifestyle! And so, Paul says:

- "Rejoice always!"— A lifestyle of worship can only begin when your heart is overflowing with the joy of your salvation in Christ!

- “Pray without ceasing!”—A lifestyle of worship is fuelled by an on-going connection of prayer with the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- “Give thanks in everything!”—A lifestyle of worship depends on having eyes that can see God’s hand in our lives, helping us to realise how much we have to be thankful for!
- “Don’t stifle the Spirit”—Without the Spirit, we cannot worship because the Spirit opens our eyes to God’s presence through every moment of life.
- “Don’t despise prophecies but test the spirits”—The prophetic word sustains our worship by reminding us of God’s goodness for today and throughout all of history. Evil spirits will try to undermine our confidence in the prophetic word of God’s goodness.
- “Hold onto what is good”—The continuous attitude of a worshipful heart will always result in good behaviour—behaviour that aligns itself with what is good and right.
- “Stay away from evil.”—Similarly, the continuous attitude of a worshipful heart will also result in a behaviour that resists evil and exposes it as wrong.

The general point that Paul is making through these 7 commands is that worship is not so much something we do but something that is stimulated from deep inside of us, fuelled by a moment-by-moment, personal relationship with God and the assurance that He has entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. **The deeper our relationship with God, the deeper (and more life-encompassing) will be our worship!**-- All of life becomes filled with ‘prayerful worship’!

And that’s why a person doesn’t even need to sing in order to worship—worship can happen without music! You can even worship in silence (“Be still and know that I am God”—Ps 46:10)!

You can worship God when you're all alone! But you can also worship God when you are active—like when you're on the soccer field or in an exam room—or when you are surrounded by people in a crowded train! What's even more amazing is that we don't even need to be in a good place or in the right mood for worship —The Apostle Paul worshipped when he was in prison! The disciple Stephen worshipped when he was facing death! Why? Because **their worship flowed out of prayerful hearts.**

How different Paul's idea of worship is to the one that we find in most churches today! As I said earlier, there's a common idea circulating amongst Christians today that **worship is what we do at the beginning of a church service**—those 20-minutes of well-rehearsed singing, led by a great worship band and beautiful singers up front. Some churches go all out to enhance this worship experience with sophisticated lighting and staging -- some churches even use smoke machines!

Why do churches go to such lengths? It's often publicly acknowledged that this worship time is essentially a preliminary... a warm-up...designed to prepare our hearts to listen to the sermon! The common idea is that, **if we don't have it, we won't be ready (or in the right mood) to hear God speak!**

But the Scriptures say nothing about this! Indeed, they seem to say something quite the opposite! Instead of being a 20-minute warm-up, worship is described throughout the Bible as a 24/7 attitude of the heart...an on-going prayerful attitude that anticipates and is confidently aware of the hand of the Living God actively involved in every moment of life. **Basically, Biblical worship flows from being in tune with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!**

This is exactly what Jesus was saying in **John 14!** He was telling His disciples that, once the Spirit came upon them, they would enter into a new relationship with God ...a deep, intimate and worshipful relationship with all three persons of the Trinity! Look

at John 14:20-- **“In that day, you will know that I am in the Father, you are in Me and I am in you!”** Then, in verse 23, Jesus goes on to say that they (the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) will come and **“make their home”** with us! We can’t get any closer to God than that!

It is in this intimate, on-going, day-by-day, minute-by-minute relationship with God that all our worship of God is based! By the Spirit, we are continually reminded of God’s faithfulness through His Word; By the Spirit, we are forever led into the truth of Jesus’ sacrificial love for us; By the Spirit, we are made constantly aware of the abiding peace of God that overcomes all our anxieties and fears-- **“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.”** (John 14:27)

So, with all of this on offer to us 24/7, why do we still insist that only when we have the best music team, the highest quality sound system and lighting can we finally say that we’ve worshipped God? Something’s wrong! Let’s rethink what we are doing when we gather! Let’s slow it all down and get on our knees! Let’s be silent and thoughtful and reflective and prayerful! It’s time to get back to the true heart of worship—to the incredible dynamic of life that comes by being graciously connected into the heart of the Father, Son and Spirit. **Worship is Prayerful!**  
**Let’s pray!**